

Shego and the Spartan

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Summary: What happens when a certain Spartan finds an age-old structure that shouldn't be physically possible? A rewrite of Shego on the Halo

1. Well, it started like this

Our metaphorical curtain opens as the woman with long black hair wakes up. She smiles, stretches, and moans a little at how good it feels to stretch every so often. Then she settles down and looks at her bed-mate, happy to have one who is so close to her heart once again.

There's nothing much planned for the agenda today, so she just sits there for a moment, luxuriating in the peace that is her life at the present moment. Then she gets up and takes a brief shower, as her training shows through in how efficient she is, no matter how much she'd love to luxuriate in the wonder feeling of hot water. Instead, she settles for music as she showers and dries off, a genre of which is an odd variant of the 21st century's "Techno", in this case, a club mix of a song a song made by a YouTube user called Shadowbeatz, the song itself called Break It Down - Dance.

When she's finished, clad in just her bikini-style black leather underwear (which was given to her by a smuggler as thanks for a favor) and a pair of form-fitting black leather pants that she'd picked up special from a friend on Eridanus II (which happened to give a hint of her underwear), she left the bathroom to find her friend already up and completely dressed. Said friend just smiled and rose an eyebrow at her current attire.

"What?" She asked, smiling back. "I just forgot my sports bra is all."

"You know, if you're not careful, I might just make today an indoor

day."

"Well, my little redhead," The raven-haired woman said as she stepped closer in a very sultry way that almost had her target blushing. "I'm feeling up to a little fun." She let that sit for a moment before saying, "Wanna know what trouble Gary's stirring up?"

They just laughed as the redhead gently smacked her upside the head for her trouble. "Nah, I've got a lunch date with Donut, and you know how she is about these things." She said as she handed a public-appropriate sports-bra-slash-shirt to the other woman.

"You know," She said as she put the garment on. "I'm still surprised you two are so chummy. I'd almost expect you two at each other's throats."

The redhead gave her an inquisitive look. "Why's that?"

"Well, I mean, you guys were enemies, once upon a time."

The redhead chuckled. "Yeah, but not that much. I mean, seriously. That was mostly us just talking at each other and that's it."

"True." She grabbed a rubber band to bring her unruly waterfall of hair into a ponytail, or, at least pull it to stay completely behind her shoulders, at any rate. Meanwhile her partner put on a hat and a few select pieces of jewelry that weren't necessary technology (a pair of earrings, a fake gold bracelet which also had a homing device, and a blue and silver psuedo-choker that tended to put people off their game, particularly since it was paired with a olive drab military uniform from the Office of Naval Intelligence and it was rather high-quality. It was very simple, just a strip of quality fabric with a clasp that settled behind her neck, but it could still be very startling for those who aren't expecting it.

As she put on a hat, the woman saw this and smiled at her friend. "Need to go make an impression?"

"Yep. A few spooks need a talking to as they give a progress report, so I figure that it'd be a good idea." The redhead looked at the clock on the vanity and jumped slightly. "OOP! Gotta go!" She gave her partner a peck on the cheek and ran off, the other woman still smiling.

After that, she left their relatively luxurious quarters and did a little shopping and grabbed a donut and a Mountain Dew before she went to the training yards to observe the soldiers as they did their thing.

"I still can't believe that you eat that junk."

She smiled a little more strongly as she turned to her new companion. "Hey B. And, you know we all can't live on just plugging ourselves into the wall every so often. For the rest of us, it's caffeine and sugar that makes the world go 'round."

The woman in black armor looked at her before she took off her helmet and showed a face that was half human and half robotic in a dichotomy that mirrored Two-Face's face perfectly. The woman without the armor

was tempted to revisit the subject of fixing the damages to the prosthetic parts of her face, but let it be, deciding that today was just too good to ruin with an age-old argument. Instead, they just smiled at each other and went to the safer subjects of what was on their agendas. The armored woman was thinking about putting the Spartan-III's through their paces and maybe start a program to integrate Spartans of every generation into the normal soldier populace through forced interactions between the two groups, supported by their mutual friends in ONI.

An hour or two after she finished her donut and soda, they said their See-Ya-Laters and went on their way. Her way, today, was just drifting from place to place until a feeling pulled her in one direction. She didn't really pay much attention to where she was, which could end up problematic though she figured she'd be able to find her way around no matter where she ended up.

She went into the semi-nondescript building that exuded warmth (which the feeling was pulling her towards) and followed the feeling until she found what it was that was pulling her to it.

What she found there was a little surprising to her.

There was a man in full military Battle Dress Uniform (though, without the helmet, pack, or weapons that would mark him as a soldier on duty or anything like that) and from the looks of things, he was telling them a story. "Of course, Ghost never got to answer because right about then the entire universe died. Or, in the words of 'Washing-Tub' from Caboose's head, 'The whole world exploded AND everyone died AND the whole world exploded!'"

"Hey!"

In the room, all the children looked away from where their attention was raptly kept to the doorway where she, a tall woman in full military gear with butt-length black hair, stood with a slightly reprimanding look on her face while looking at the current storyteller. She continued to speak. "The actual line is," At this point her face became extremely expressive to over-accentuate the emotions (just like she would've in Caboose's head) while she tried to keep from bursting out in a grin. "'If you tell anyone I told you, the whole world would explode AND everyone would die AND the whole word could explode!'"

After a few seconds, the new arrival gave up and grinned at her friend. "So, what lies have you been telling them Gary?" She asked of the retired ONI operative.

The man with the solidly steel-colored hair smiled at her in a different way than he had been to the children. "Oh, just the story of how we met."

She turned to the children and spoke in a lowered, over-dramatic and conspiratorial voice, "It's all lies! Believe nothing he says!"

That got her a lot of giggles from the kids, which was the point. After listening to the questions of the children for a few moments, she looked at the man questioningly. He picked up on her unasked question and answered. "Well, to be perfectly honest" he ignored her snort here. "I was just setting it up to make sure that you would

actually tell your own story yourself."

That surprised her, but she just deflected. "Well, let's be honest here, it's just a piece of history. All in the past. So why should I bother telling everybody about it?"

"Because of all the stories I know of that involve monsters and heroes, yours is one that truly needs telling." He says with his most honest face.

She stares at him, studies him, and finally decides that he's not lying or messing with her head. He's really and truly being honest with her when he says that her story needs telling.

A new voice decides to chip in. "Besides it's not like you've got anything too traumatizing for them."

They all look at the newest arrival, a slightly shorter woman with shoulder-length (and fairly stylish) red hair who was smiling amusedly at everything that she saw in the room. She also happened to be the raven-haired woman's roommate, and was still wearing her BDUs and choker with the rest of her jewelry.

The woman with the black hair looked from the man to the other woman to the children and back. Then, after another few moments, she slumped a little and sighed in defeat. "Fine. I'll do it. But it's not the best story, I'll warn ya."

The children's smiles brightened the room by a few hundred megawatts as they hunkered down for the story.

"Well, it started like this, with an A.I. and a Spartan doing a routine mission to beat bad-guy butt..."

2. 1: The Structure

Other than the usual animal noises that you would expect to come from a tropical rainforest, pretty much the whole jungle was quiet. It was hot, it was sweaty, and there were Unggoy dying all over the place.

Oh, did I forget to mention that it was filled with a rather large group of Covenant forces that Spartan-117 had been charged to destroy all on his lonesome while the other marines of the currently nearby UNSC forces (and most of their command structure) were dealing with the affects of an unknown bacterial strain native to this planet that loved the water? Well, there's those creatures too!

As the Master Chief Petty Officer snuck up and killed yet another Grunt with his bare hands (well, gauntleted hands) he thought about the mission briefing and how oddly the mission had begun.

They had found the jungle planet some days before based off of some intelligence gathered by some reclusive ONI spooks from the intelligence division that not even he or Cortana knew much of anything about, other than some unverifiable rumors about the unfindable "Ghost". No records were available to either man or machine about how it was found, but there was one thing that was certain: no matter their feelings about the situation, orders were

orders, and when a spook from the Office of Naval Intelligence with a more powerful writ-given authority than anyone else on the ship (including the Master Chief Petty Officer known as Spartan-117) came and told you to go to the ass-end of space looking for God-knows-what because of God-knows-why, you did it.

When they'd gotten there, the Spook they'd picked up "to ensure the completion of the task given by the UNSC Office of Naval Intelligence" (otherwise known as Agent Lane, no first name given) had been adamant that the SPARTAN on board be kept off the mission, seemingly ignoring what he'd earlier said about the mission's apparent importance. In a rare moment of lack of attention, for which he later reprimanded himself, he'd planned out how to kill the ONI Officer in front of him instead of listening to his reasoning for keeping the armored super-soldier on the ship.

Of course, bringing the guy along, as per his instructions was not the best idea ever, if the radio communications sent somewhat secretly by the other soldiers are to be believed.

According to them, this is what happened. As soon as the fireteam had made camp, the Spook and one of the soldiers detailed to his security (aka, bodyguard assigned by some idiot in the bureaucracy who happened to be greener than grass, or in this case, the planet's ecosystem) decided to go looking for fresh water rather than drink "some vacuum-bag covered slush pretending to be vitamin water!", they'd left with one of their guys, who also happened to be as green a soldier as you could possibly be while serving in the United Nations Space Command's Marine Corps.

When they had come back from their little foraging trip, they'd been fine. But the next day, the three felt sick, and the day after, they were in the infirmary with serious and debilitating cramps. The doctors decided to use this as an example for why you shouldn't simply assume that the unfiltered water from a strange new planet was not always safe to drink, and being that he'd been a history buff he also cited drinking water from 20th century India (causing "Delhi Belly" in India, which was upset stomach to a more serious degree and other simple but debilitating digestive problems) and Mexico, though he professed no knowledge of any specific water-related disease found in 20th century Mexico. A few of the soldiers added a few stories about drinking water with rust in it from badly-maintained ships, and after that, despite Lane's continued orders, they kept to the camp.

That proved lucky, as a few other soldiers who'd had water from the flasks they'd brought with them and the history-buff doctor himself all started coming down with the same symptoms. They called in to the ship, the UNSC Defiant Vengeance, that they'd decided to quarantine the camp after calling it an epidemic, given that no one there had actually escaped the disease, and from there they quickly found through blood samples that it was a bacterial infection, probably transferred by contact with fluids, such as the water Lane and company drank from or the sweat of the soldiers who came into contact with them. After that, he told what had happened from his point of view in the typical level of professionalism associated with well-trained members of the UNSC Navy.

That's when Lane co-opted the call and ordered Captain Michaelson to send down the Spartan to finish the mission, once again focusing on

the importance of the mission. Michaelson gave a token effort of protest, though he was really fishing for information, mostly on what exactly they were doing there, what were they looking for. After the first few responses, Lane figured it out, got fed up, and decided to simply tell them straight-out, and while that was unexpected, what he got out of it threatened to break his semi-famous calm.

"We don't know what it is we're looking for here." Lane said, after panting from the immense tropical heat of the planet and the bacterial sickness in his body. "All we know for sure is that there is a signal powerful enough to be found by civilian equipment in Kandus IV." Kandus IV was an Outer Colony that had so far managed to avoid the ravages of the invading Covenant, though when it was it would give a hell of a fight for its survival, given that it was a UNSC military research facility that had so far been missed by the rebelling Insurrectionists, though given it's highly secretive nature that was no surprise. What was a surprise, however, was the fact that it had to be at least a good three hundred light-years away. For a signal to reach there and be comprehensible would mean that it was either really powerful, or really old and insanely lucky. Given what they knew of space and it's exploration, especially that the Kandus system had only been found a century ago, and the fact that they now knew that they weren't alone in the universe, ONI's, and Lane's, bets were on powerful technology that could potentially help win the war.

The fact that Lane then revealed that they'd picked up Covenant signals while on planet said that the possibility of powerful technology was the most likely, and that they therefore had to claim it before the genocidal coalition of aliens did.

So, armed with that information, Michaelson assembled a few marines to support John, yanked Cortana from the Vengeance to help him find his target and keep this beacon of hope for the human race alive, and sent them off to the planet with specific instructions that the only contact allowed between them and the marines already there was radio communication, nothing physical.

Of course, not everybody is perfect, and not everybody follows orders to the letter. And, of course, the universe decided that it wouldn't be that easy for the poor pitiful humans. Something on or in the planet screwed with the propulsion and navigation systems of the dropship they used to arrive and they crash-landed a fair distance from where they were supposed to be. They decided to head in the approximate location of the camp, confirmed by Cortana's readouts in his helmet and communication with the Vengeance, to resupply and more accurately find the location of the signal, which they could only barely detect from the crash site. They left behind their craft because it was pretty much trashed to the point of unsalvageable and they had no one capable of fixing it with them.

When they set up camp for the night, they were within sight distance of the camp, and John volunteered to get as much information as he could, while ordering the marines to stay put and protect the camp. When someone tried to go with him, he vetoed it with his rank and logic. His suit, being airtight and Space-Worthy, should keep him safe from disease. The others, however, would not be safe, given that none were actually ODST's, and thus were without sealed suits.

From the quarantined camp, and their reconnaissance soldiers in

particular, he learned all he needed to know, and he left for the makeshift camp. That's when he found that three of the soldiers were missing. The one from earlier who'd tried to go with him and two others. He set out to search for them, but they found their way back while he was gone, but something came with them.

The epidemic.

By the time he got back, he was the only uninfected UNSC soldier there, and he had to bring them all to Quarantine while most of them were still capable of their own ability to walk. Most of them had to be poked and prodded into the march to stay safe, but in the end, they all arrived, if barely. He moved them as carefully as possible to the infirmary beds, which now held all the soldiers not AWOL or unaccounted-for from both trips with a few to spare, and gave a status update to Lane.

He decided to take the time to sleep before he making the trip under cover of nightfall. After all, while the camp was indeed defenseless, he would need that rest, and if the Covenant was here, he'd need the added protection of the darkness of nightfall. He was the only friendly force capable of finding whatever it was the had attracted the Covenant here, and he needed to either get it before they did, or destroy it so that they couldn't have it.

After nightfall, John began his march. 10 minutes of armed silent and solitary strolling later, they'd found a set of overgrown ruins made from a type of metal that he recognized as being something that had never been properly identified to him after he'd turned in a few samples to Dr. Halsey he had found while on a training mission on Reach. That was also when they managed to positively gain a fix on the mysterious signal they'd been sent to investigate. Unfortunately, the piece of the signal they'd managed to recover was thoroughly degraded and what was recoverable was mostly gibberish, but it at least confirmed that they were going in the right direction.

That lead him back to the present time of killing his, perhaps, twentieth grunt in the past 23 minutes. He wasn't sure because when they clustered like that and were trying to kill him, there wasn't much of an opportunity to really count them. Not that it mattered, since he never actually counted kills anyway.

Cortana spoke up. "Chief?"

"Yes?"

"I've managed to isolate the source of the signal. Scans show it to be within a structure not far from here. I'm putting a Nav Point on it."

A small blue diamond appeared on his Heads Up Display with a number next to it: 400m. That wasn't too far at all, a quarter mile, in fact. If terrain stayed as unprohibitive as it was, then he could reach the structure within five minutes.

Not counting Covenant roadblocks, of course.

He nodded on reflex, acknowledging the directive, and moving in the indicated direction.

At about 200 meters, he stepped onto some weak roots and fell through to where water had eroded the dirt underneath a large tree, which turned out to be right next to a cave system that kept him a little stumped, always giving him dead ends instead of a way forwards or upwards, and also giving the occasional subterranean predator that would try to kill him out of territorial issues.

After a quick underwater jaunt, his HUD said 157m next to the Nav Point, though it was up at an angle, and he'd found a natural ramp that would allow him to get back to the surface. After shaking out the water, he climbed the ramp, though he paused halfway when his motion tracker pinged a rather large blob of dots. Cautiously, he poked his head up from behind the lip of the ramp and was almost struck dumb, a very difficult thing for the man who'd learned, lived, and breathed war for most of his life, and thus was surprised or shocked by very little, and had long since learned to roll with the punches, wherever they may come from.

There was a very large collection of Covenant troops in front of a massive structure that was covered by the gigantic tree he'd seen from the camps, many of the individual roots thicker than 2 of the drop pods used to deploy the Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, ODST's for short or Helljumpers as they were more commonly known, put side by side. The tree seemed to have grown around the structure. Oddly enough, some of the outside panels seemed to be loose.

"Cortana?" He prompted.

"Scanning." She said. After a moment, she continued. "Scan confirmed. This is where the signal is coming from."

"Then this is where we're going."

"I recommend you find some way to distract or disorient the group in front of us, as there seems to be no other entrance." Cortana advised.

He nodded in acknowledgement, visually scanning the area for a way to distract them, and found it rather quickly. There was a downed Covenant Dropship nearby, where a bird-like Jackal was tinkering with a part of the machine where the paneling was open before it yelled at a Grunt for interfering. From the way that the Jackal gestured, it would be rather bad, possibly explosive for that area to be damaged. 'Well, let's see what could be done to make their day better.' He thought to himself with a grim smile. Pulling out his Designated Marksman Rifle, he aimed for the area around the Jackal, where the Grunt had been at, more specifically, and looked for a spot that would be marked as more dangerous than other areas.

There was one spot, angular like in Human construction rather than the more common fluid designs favored by Covenant architects, and he took a gamble.

He fired at that angular spot a few times, and was gratified by the explosion that engulfed the entire dropship, plus the Jackal who'd been working on it and the Grunt it'd yelled at, plus an Elite that had been standing nearby, and throwing the rest of them into disarray.

"Well, it's a little flashy, but it oughtta work." Cortana said,

critiquing his actions. "We better move quickly, the Covenant inside the structure will have been alerted by the explosion."

He grunted as he pulled the trigger a third time after the explosion. As Cortana had been talking, he'd been firing from his position. Perhaps not the smartest move, but it was the best one he had as if he tried for a better vantage or better cover, he'd have to expose himself completely for a time. Good for intimidation, but not so much for survival when there are still too many enemies. True, his armor's shields could take the brunt of the assault, but in moving he'd attract all their attention from their confused state, and while his armor could take a beating, their plasma was still deadly, and too much concentrated fire would knock out his shields for a time, enough to get him killed if he wasn't careful.

His first shot had taken out the other Elite on overwatch. His second shot had taken out the grunt sitting in the turret nearby, the bullets ripping through his body and, luckily, exploding his breather tank by catching the Methane inside on fire, somehow destroying the turret in the ensuing fireball. His third had killed the only Jackal he could see that had both an energy shield and a long-distance weapon rather than a pistol. His fourth and fifth were sent at a Jackal that held a Needler, the fourth bouncing off and hitting a Grunt in the side, currently non-lethally, while the fifth hit the target, which caused a knee-jerk reaction in the Jackal's hand, sending Needler rounds into another Jackal and a Grunt, causing his breather tank to explode as well, lighting up several other nearby Grunts.

Never one to question such fortuitous events, nor one to squander opportunity whenever it presented itself, the Master Chief stood as he swapped the DMR for the Assault Rifle attached to his back and strode in to finish off what was left of the opposition. He scavenged a few Plasma Grenades off the bodies of the fallen and strode into structure as he reloaded his weapons, making sure to keep them both ready for any possibility.

He also knew that, unless standards were seriously lacking here, there would be more Covenant inside the structure, and they would have likely heard at least some of the commotion, unless the walls were particularly thick, so he would have to work fast.

Of course, hitting superior targets hard and fast and coming away unscathed was something of a specialty for him.

With only the slightest sense of hesitation or foreboding, he confidently strode into the gigantic structure in front of him. He took a moment to consider the structure before he entered, though. It was a hulking collection of steel reminiscent of the Helljumpers' Drop Pods, large and egg-like, obviously designed to withstand the great temperatures of atmospheric re-entry. On top of the structure was an enormous tree, one that appeared to be several centuries old, if only for the sheer width or height of the tree, it's rather massive roots covering the outer surface of the tree rather effectively.

And then he stepped through the door, cutting off his view of the tree as it slid shut behind him. While he was stuck in complete darkness, the VISR mode of his HUD and the helmet-mounted flashlight allowed him to see what was going on around him. He strode cautiously

through the structure, knowing that he was completely unaware of any possible traps inside. He noticed that some of the paneling on the walls had fallen off over the years, revealing ancient wiring and circuitry, as well as the odd piece of flora.

Cortana noticed this too and ran a scan on the structure. "It appears as though the roots of the tree atop this place has infiltrated the circuitry, in some areas replacing it completely. It is also possible that certain areas have been similarly replaced by roots and vegetation and may block our path or present obstacles that wouldn't otherwise be here."

"Can you find a way around them?" He asked the AI in his head as he moved on from his examination of the wiring, assault rifle at the ready.

"Give me a few minutes and I'll have a working map of the structure and a way around any vines you may find." She responded confidently."

He gave her a nod and continued on silently. A minute later, he found a room filled with methane gas and sleeping Grunts. Knowing it would be best to not fire off his weapons (he wasn't particularly fond of flight by explosion when he was the flier), he silently crept over to the enemies and smashed their heads in as quietly as he could, one by one, allowing him to keep moving without the slightest interruption or allowing the other members of the Covenant that were sure to be around. He did manage to grab a few more plasma grenades from the Unngoy corpses in the meantime, but he really needed to keep moving.

3 turns later, however, he was a little stymied. Right in front of him was a wall of very tightly pressed roots, each half as wide as your average trooper. They thoroughly blocked his way forward and he didn't remember a turnoff before reaching here after the room converted to a barracks for the methane-breathers. As he turned around to retrace his steps, Cortana mentioned that she was working on it. As he exited the Methane-filled room a second time, she piped up again. "Chief, I've found a way to get to the next floor, closer to the signal I picked up earlier. I'm putting a Nav Beacon on your HUD."

A small blue diamond appeared with a notation saying it was only 50 meters away. It did take some circling around in the hallways to reach, but once there, he found a set of stairs that led to the next level up. Following them, he reached the third floor before vines blocked his way forward and he was forced to once again make his way through the hallways in search of another way through.

That was when he started noticing the turrets.

This was not to say that he had been unobservant before, but rather to say that that's when he first came upon them. There was a small broken machine which was obviously a weapon of some sort, though it's design was more in line with Covenant Plasma weaponry than Human projectile weaponry. However, it matched neither of them. While it was somewhat obviously Human in aesthetics, the actual design didn't appear to match either side, nor did it appear to be Forerunner tech, which left them baffled. However, their pause was interrupted when the entire structure shifted strongly enough to make the Master Chief

Petty Officer to stumble.

"Perhaps we should get moving." Cortana mentioned nervously as he regained his footing and continued to move through the structure. "There's no telling when this structure will collapse on us if it keeps shifting like that."

"Nervous, Cortana?" He teased her, trying to keep her mind off of that chilling subject, though it made him nervous as well.

"Just a little." She replied nervously. "And remember, there's two of us in here, so be careful where you hit that head of yours!" She scolded him.

He chuckled before nodding his head in promise. "You know me." He turned a corner and froze for a moment as he saw four of those turrets pointed straight at him in front of a wall of roots. His heart stopped for that moment, and he only remembered to breathe when he realized that none of the turrets currently had power. He stepped up to them and examined them while he had a chance. These turrets were certainly powerful-looking, though the reality would not be actually discernable without power, and these looked a little different than the one encountered earlier, having come from more obvious circular bases set into the walls rather than appearing to have simply popped up out of the floor with the floor tile attached to the top of the turret.

"These weapons are amazingly advanced." Cortana mentioned. "In fact, I'm rather surprised that they're even slightly functional after all this time, if that tree began growing the second the structure landed here."

He gave her a nod of acknowledgement as he continued to stare at the turret. For some reason that he could not place, it felt, almost as though the turret was still alive, almost like it was looking at him as he was looking at it.

He shook the feeling off as he turned away, looking for another way through, before the entire structure gave another violent shift and he was suddenly pelted by Covenant weaponry. Pistols, rifles, and portable plasma cannons (which are normally known as either manned placeable turrets or by their more official name of the Type 52 Directed Energy Support Weapon, though the official name is quite the mouthful) all battered his powered armor and it's shielding, making it a little difficult to stand for a few moments before the barrage ended. He looked all around him at the owner-less weapons, every single one without the slightest glow indicating that any of them had the slightest charge of power.

If Cortana had had a physical body next to him, they likely would have looked at each other with surprised looks on their faces, each wondering what exactly did this.

Wordlessly, Cortana placed another Nav Beacon on his HUD and he followed it. While they both knew that this entire structure would be something of a goldmine for the R&D boys, they were also worried that whatever had caused this to the superior technology of the Covenant, then maybe the same could happen to the two of them. They didn't want to really examine the possibilities entailed in such a statement, so they didn't pause to examine it too closely.

That clear floor had been a respite, but the next few floors were absolutely covered with Covenant forces, including the ever-present hunchbacked-seeming Grunts with methane tanks on their backs connected to masks for breathing and small arms for defense; the powerful and arrogant Elites, the seven-foot tall aliens with separated lower jaws and energy shielding of their own; and even a number of Jackals, with their arm-mounted shields that made them very difficult to take down in such an enclosed space. Luckily, a few grenades took care of the Jackals and the Elites quite handily where they couldn't dodge, and bullets took care of what Grunts remained, though he himself had a bit of a hard time for the same reasons and was ambushed a few times, though luckily he was fast enough that he never actually depleted his shields' reserves of power before he got to cover.

During another quiet floor, he checked over his ammunition reserves to see what he had. He had 2 additional magazines for his assault rifle and half of one inside the weapon, which would be real easy to burn through, and only one and a half clips worth of bullets for his DMR, which would be just as easy to burn through. He was getting a little worried, though he didn't let it show. Hopefully, he could handle whatever may come with just his 2 unused fragmentation grenades, which he had been forebearing to use when he had a supply of Plasma Grenades available, and the four plasma grenades he had left. And while the short trip to what appeared to be a rather ancient power generation room was somewhat informative, it was ultimately useless to the mission.

When he got to the stairs, a group of Unggoy ambushed him and his shields went down to half strength before he could really retaliate. Then he went behind cover and unloaded the remainder of the loaded clip in his assault rifle, killing them all before he reloaded. He then climbed the stairs and scavenged the corpses for grenades, grimly silent as he entered what appeared to be his destination, the one containing the source of the signal he'd been following the entire day.

He found another group of Grunts and decided that it would be more efficient to use the grenades he'd scavenged rather than use up his ammunition, and sent off a plasma grenade, which stuck to the head of the Grunt in the middle a half-second before it exploded, which also set off the grenades that the other Grunts held, ruthlessly eradicating the entire group. He moved on, not even taking the time to acknowledge the corpses as he trod over them.

A few turns later and he had to take cover after having taken a direct hit from an overcharged plasma bolt from a plasma pistol, which completely depleted his shields. He lobbed a frag grenade down the hall at the group of Jackals who'd taken potshots at him while his shields were down and prepared to fight again once the grenade went off.

He wasn't expecting the sounds of life to be completely cut off by the grenade, but he was expecting the emergency lighting to come on even less.

"Amazing!" Cortana said as she used the MJOLNIR Mk5's sensors to study what was happening.

"Cortana?" He asked tersely to remind her that he couldn't actually see those readings unless she told him what was going on.

"John, those generators we saw earlier have activated and power has started flowing through the entire structure again. Granted, not everything has power at the moment, but almost everything is operational, including what appears to be the data archives, which only have a single direct access terminal."

"And how would you know this?" He asked tersely.

"Oh, through the main computers. There is wireless access to those, and from the way the programs are written, this structure is positively ancient. Data-Time stamps dictate that these were made somewhere in the early twenty-first century, but some of the security programs here are so complex that they would be right at home in an ONI database, even the ones on Reach, and you know how powerful those are."

The Master Chief nodded. He knew all too well. Reach, a planet only ten and a half light years away from Earth, was his home, had been for most of his life. It was also the home to the second most populous and successful human colony world and one of the United Nations Space Command's greatest military powerhouses, not to mention it was also the home to the - technically off-the-books project - known as the Spartan-II project, which had collected the children of several of the original members of the supposedly mythical ORION project - which made the predecessors to the Spartan-II's - and trained them, augmented them, and turned the children into the super-soldiers they'd need to win the civil war against the Insurrectionists. Little did the project heads know that they would become instrumental in a war that they had little, if any, indication would be coming and would try to destroy the Human Species forever. The Human-Covenant War.

FLEETCOM base in the mountains of Reach were the barracks in which the soon-to-be Spartans lived, ate, and spent time with each other outside of combat exercises and, later, active combat. It also held one of the most advanced and powerful banks of computer technologies, which necessitated one of the most complex and powerful defenses in the known galaxy. A friend of his, Sierra-007 had been quite the hacker, and had tried several times to get through the firewalls, only to be stonewalled every time. She was good enough for any other system, just not the one which regulated their home. Not the last time he'd seen her, that is.

However, this information was somewhat disturbing. This was the mid-twenty-sixth century. They'd had time to get immensely good at just about everything. True, they didn't have plasma weaponry, common anti-grav technology, or teleporters, or anything else of that nature, but among the arts of war, they'd developed faster-than-light technologies at the very least, and anything to do with deception or war, such as corporate espionage, should be far better than anything from 500 years before. And yet...

He removed himself from the alcove he'd been hiding in, his shields recovered and the Jackals dead, and moved on, determined to find the answers, and knowing them to be with or near the source of the signal.

The signal was getting much stronger now, and strange words that sounded like some form of communication resounded through his head thanks to his neural lace, the piece of technology lacing his brain which allowed him to more greatly control his armor and house Cortana inside his head.

When the Nav Beacon on his HUD said 50m, a door opened up as he passed it, staying open as he paused and turned back to it. It hadn't closed even though he'd already left it behind, so maybe something wanted him to go in. Wary of a possible trap, though he knew it unlikely, he stepped into the room, watching his motion tracker closely. He and Cortana were the only two here, and so he had no one to really watch his back. He had to be careful. A shiver ran down his spine.

In this new room, it was dim. Brighter than the outside hallways' dull flashing red lights, but still very dim. It was also large and very messy. Various pieces of junk lay strewn around, cluttering up the place and looking like an abandoned laboratory for mad science. There were hoses, mechanical pieces, robotic limbs and bodies, machines attached to the ceiling, walls, and floor, and absolutely none of it made any sense to the Spartan. Some of it may have to Cortana, but there was entirely too much to really figure it out. The signal was coming from somewhere in the middle of all that junk. He stepped towards it, determined.

Before he could go further, however, things took a turn for the worse. A badly aimed explosion knocked him off his feet and flying off to his right. Then his motion tracker showed a large red blip. Well, a little late, but at least it still worked. He scrambled to his feet, Spartan's unnatural grace making the action look dignified as he looked for his attacker. His heart dropped when he saw it.

It was a twelve-foot-tall behemoth, mechanical armor vaguely reminiscent of a sparser version of a knight's suit of armor, corded skin replaced by lines of luminous orange worm-like bodies which work together as a single mass with a huge and nearly indestructible shield on the left 'arm' and a powerful assault cannon, a variation on the colloquially known Fuel Rod Cannon - the Covenant version of a rocket launcher that sent gigantic balls of plasma flying through the air to explode on contact - replacing the 'right hand'. The spines shooting from the back of the 'torso' armor made of the same blue metal as the rest of the armor - other than the inner workings of the cannon and the shield - only added to the fearsome image.

This, was a Hunter. The most powerful single targets in the entire Covenant military, and perhaps the most feared due to their impressive stature, powerful weaponry, seeming indestructibility, and the fact that they never hunted alone, always in pairs.

But as the Chief knew, it wasn't impossible to kill them. Just very difficult.

He tossed his second Frag grenade at the monster as the cannon charged up before he dodged into a roll, his heavy armor making surprisingly little sound as he dodged the charged plasma, which exploded against the wall as harmlessly as the grenade which landed next to the monster's long shield, however, the field of battle was suddenly halved when a wall came down, separating the combatants from the greater majority of the junk, as well as crushing some of the

junk next to him. If he'd been just a foot or two to the right, he would've been crushed like a tomato can. He aimed his assault rifle at the creature and began firing as it shifted with some clunking. Then it began to charge and the Chief threw himself to the ground to his right to avoid the attack, a plasma grenade in his hand. While the Hunter was recovering from the momentum of the charge, which had sent it into the wall that had almost crushed the Master Chief earlier, the super-soldier in question activated and tossed the grenade in his hand, causing it to stick to the exposed back of the beast, which then exploded, killing it instantly.

As it slumped to the floor, John was finding it a little hard to catch his breath and normalize his heartbeat for some reason. It wasn't the first time he'd gotten into a dangerous situation, but this could count as the closest he'd come to death with so little ability to change it. However, as the thought formed, he pushed it aside as unimportant and kept on guard. There was no telling where the other Hunter was. The wall the dead Hunter was slumped against began to lift, leaving a streak of the luminescent gold-orange blood on the metal slab that had sealed the room as it disappeared into the ceiling.

When nothing came out to kill him, he cautiously made his way through the junk cluttering this other half of the room towards his objective.

At 5m, there was a sudden and familiar noise. The clacking that signified the movement of a Hunter. He dodged to the side, anticipating an attempt by the creature to kill him, and turned to see it. It was basically laying against a pile of junk like a wounded soldier, making an obvious effort to raise the cannon welded to it's right arm as it charged it up. It was bleeding from numerous wounds, practically covered in the slimy, goey substance the color of molten gold that made up the Covenant creature's blood. After a moment, John knew he was doomed. With the way the junk around him was laid out, he'd backed himself into a corner deep enough that he wouldn't be able to reach the corner before the cannon went off, and none of the nearby junk was small enough or fragile enough for him to be able to jump through.

There wouldn't even be time to bring up his gun and start uselessly shooting.

This was the end.

And then something happened that surprised and confused Hunter, Soldier, and AI.

The cannon fizzled out instead of sending superheated plasma flying.

And then all hell broke loose inside his suit. It was a very complicated set of powered armor, with a special set of self-diagnostic computers and sensor equipment, and almost every alarm in it was suddenly going off, blasting his eardrums as worrying alerts were displayed on his HUD as Cortana read off to him the most worrying.

"Alert! There is a massive drain on the shields and the armor's powerpack! What the hell could possibly be draining it?" She asked

that last one to him, who could only wince in pain from the sheer amount of sound blasting his ears to pieces. Given that the MJOLNIR MkV armor was powered by a miniature fission reactor, or in layman's terms a miniature sun less than half the size of a Marine's equipment pack, he didn't have a clue.

He vaguely heard a sound very similar to a set of crystal Needler rounds exploding through the sounds of the alarms disorienting him before he felt the plasma grenades on his belt popping like a cheap animated bubble effect. All but one, and the bar showing the power of his shields, though flickering and grainy like the rest of his HUD was at the moment, stopped just before showing empty.

Then, through all the din, a pneumatic *hiss* was heard right before something large and heavy slammed through what John could see of the room, smashing into the laid-out Hunter like a MAC round and sending junk flying before it stopped flying with a solid *thunk*.

Warily, he made his way over to the corner that used to house the injured creature and poked his head around the junk separating it from view. The far wall was covered in the creature's blood, the fuel rod gun (as the handheld version of the weapon is colloquially known) was five feet away from the heaviest concentration of blood underneath a thick, heavy slab of metal twice the size of the creature's shield, which was a similar distance away from the slab as the cannon.

Then he decided to find out what it was that had destroyed the fearsome can of worms. He turned around and cocked his head. That was odd, it wasn't a weapon at all. In fact, it looked like a cryogenic tube like the ones used on various ships, especially military, to transport living beings large distances. He knew the design of the modern version quite well, due to having spent so much time around and in them.

"Fascinating." Cortana mentioned, her scientific nature showing through her normally analytical semi-military programming. "It appears to be a cryo tube, like what we already have in use, but far too advanced. This is beyond what even we have now. Scanning." She paused in her talking, and he let her take her time. His suit may have very advanced sensors for her to use, but they weren't perfect, nor were they rated for ship use, as those would be a little too massive for infantry to use, even when the infantry in question is a Spartan. "Chief, I can't scan it from this far. There's too much interference coming from somewhere. Get closer to it." He nodded and did as he was told. This wasn't the first time he'd been used as a mobile science platform by his Artificial Intelligence, so he was used to it.

As he got close to it, however, he started getting more aware of his surroundings, as well as himself.

His HUD began to be disrupted, little glitches forming along all the translucent sky blue lines displayed on the inside of the reflective glass in front of his face, but he could still see everything displayed upon it perfectly, as if it were a natural part of his vision just like seeing colors, or as if he were just as integrated with the suit as Cortana's data-like self. A few spots of skin under his armor began to itch, somehow telling him that he'd gotten a few minor plasma burns under his armor, though those parts of the durable

metal were still unbreached, though not unblemished, the green paint scorched off.

Then he noticed that the Nav Beacon placed for the signal's source was centered in the middle of the machinery, right behind where the heavily frosted-over glass tube sat in front of him, and that was the specific area that was getting the most powerful part of the sensor's beam, as Cortana directed them.

Wait, how did he know that?

"Chief, the tube is ancient, and the circuitry surrounding it are actually older, and every single piece of equipment must be older than the tree on top of the structure." She said in his ear, and for a second he could've sworn she was right next to him, breathing in his ear. "There is no power source not built by the Forerunners that could possibly give this device power." His HUD was completely gone by now, the disruptions caused by the sheer power of the signal in front of them disabling it completely, though he was strangely unbothered by this. "This should not be possible at all. In fact, the power of the signal is actually getting stronger."

His mind, suddenly cleared by those words, connected them to a possibility, and though he did not move to retreat, he did explore what the possibility could mean.

A proximity-activated bomb, an improvised explosion caused by overloading the circuitry in the local area to protect sensitive data or prototypes, a distress signal, different than what was already active, perhaps a Covenant measure.

He came upon and explored each of those possibilities in less than a second before his gut decided that it wasn't any of those and that he shouldn't run. And even if he should, it wouldn't save him.

Suddenly, a wave of power slammed into him, making him stumble back from the machinery and allowing his HUD to come back online. For some reason, he felt almost like he was blind and deaf for just a moment. Then, he could feel it as the power of the signal dropped.

He shook his head, ignoring what Cortana was saying before he focused and cut her off. "Cortana, we have a mission to do. We have found the source of the signal, and now we need to report it in."

There was a beat of silence as Cortana heard and processed. "Acknowledged." She said to him, all business, before she turned her attention to their ship, which was still lying in wait above the planet. "Cortana to Defiant Vengeance, we have found the source of the signal and request an evac and several Longswords to bring it back up."

"Copy that Cortana." A male voice answered, though a little crackly due to the influence of the signal's near position, despite the lowered power level. "Though I gotta ask, if you're asking for Longswords, just how big is this thing?"

"The signal itself appears to have come from an advanced Cryo-Tube. However, due to the way that the device appears to be integrated into the floor and the wires and vacuum tubes are spiderwebbed around the

room, I believe that we would not be able to remove it from the structure without potentially damaging whatever it is that it contains, not with equipment we can use here on-site. We'll need to bring the entire structure with us."

"Roger that Cortana. Longswords will be sent to your position to collect the structure while Pelicans are sent to collect the wounded and sick."

"Roger that Defiant. We will be awaiting pickup." She cut the connection before she continued. "While we're waiting, we might as well see if we can find anything from those archives."

He considered this, then nodded. It probably wouldn't hurt to look. A Nav Beacon appeared on his HUD, which he followed to a computer terminal built into the wall. One so primitive that it held a screen, a physical keyboard, and no visible method of accessing it in any other way.

Cortana swore. "If the security here is the same as it was in the main computers, then this will be a problem. Especially if the programs are actually more powerful, which I would think they will be." She said. "We'll probably have to find a way to cut into the wall without damaging the archives before we'll be able to get in."

Not entirely comprehending how hard it could be, but accepting Cortana's words, he nodded and moved to go through the long trip back to the outside of the structure, still on guard in case any other Covenant were to appear. Then he waited for the Longswords to appear so that he could help them collect the structure and bring it back to the Defiant Vengeance.

End
file.